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## FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION(S)

**Submitted by: Kathy Murphy, US Forest Service**

**Finding:** Forests in the Lake Tahoe Basin are overly dense. Fuels treatments including thinning and prescribed fire have proven to be effective at modifying fire behavior during extreme fire conditions. These fuel treatments provide a safe area for firefighters to operate and improve the chances of tree survival following catastrophic fire.

**Background and Supporting Evidence:** A century of fire suppression has led to an over crowded forest and an increase in fuel loadings over historical levels. The role of natural fire has been eliminated. Fuel treatments in the Angora fire were proven to be effective at modifying fire behavior under extreme conditions except in areas of steep slopes (USDA, An Assessment of Fuel Treatment Effects on Fire Behavior, Suppression Effectiveness, and Structure Ignition on the Angora Fire, 2007). Areas without fuel treatments, including SEZ's, experienced stand replacing fire. There are numerous additional examples on other wildfires where this same observable fact has occurred.

Prescribed Fire restores native forest conditions, protects the forest from catastrophic wildfire, and is often the most cost effective means to reduce the build-up of fuels. The effects of low to moderate intensity prescribed fires are very beneficial to the ecosystem, contrary to the often negative effects of high intensity wildfires. Prescribed burning is a critical tool that can be used to restore and maintain ecosystem components including vegetation, soils, watershed function, aquatic organisms, insects, diseases, and terrestrial animals and their habitats. Prescribed fire also protects human elements of life, property and cultural resources from damage by future wildfire, by decreasing surface fuel loading and potential wildfire intensity.

### Recommendation(s)

- 1) Continue and increase implementation of thinning and prescribed fire treatments in an expeditious manner to promote a fire resilient forest.

- 2) Consider more intensive treatments on steeper slopes. The current regulatory constraints should be reviewed to ensure implementation of this recommendation.
- 3) Prescribed Fire and fuel treatment must be promoted as effective means of managing for a fire resilient forest. Practitioners of prescribed fire should develop educational materials outlining the benefits of prescribed fire and fuel treatments to better inform regulators and the public.

**Impacts of Implementation:** Areas that are thinned and burned will have more chance of surviving a catastrophic wildfire. Impacts are a reduced loss of forest due to wildfire, reduced costs of fire suppression and reduced emissions.

Analysis of impacts on the following factors is REQUIRED (Best Estimate):

- ☐ Cost
- ☐ Funding source
- ☐ Staffing
- ☐ Existing regulations and/or laws

Analysis of impacts on the following factors is OPTIONAL:

- ☐ Operational
- ☐ Social
- ☐ Political
- ☐ Policy
- ☐ Health and Safety
- ☐ Environmental
- ☐ Interagency